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Fall 2008 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

~Please Print Clearly~

Instructor's name AMY LEVINE

Department ANTHR Course # and title 1167 GENERATIONS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PERSONS THINGS

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CAMPUS TOUR ETHNOGRAPHY

Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature

Amy Levine

Date

12/11/08

Name: Amy Levine

Department: Anthropology

Course: (Anthropology 1167) Generations: Anthropological Approaches to Persons and Things

Semester: Fall 2008

Prize: James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence

Abstract: the Campus Tour Ethnography assignment sequence presumes no background in empirical research, or ethnography; rather, it aims to systematically walk students through the kind of careful, recursive “intellectual work” James Slevin describes in his *Letter to Maggie*. The sequence includes instructions provided to students, a peer review form, and an example of how I did the first steps which served as an in-class preparatory exercise. The campus tour was an effective ethnographic site for this course given its focus on generations, but this assignment sequence could easily be modified to other courses and ethnographic sites. Ultimately, it invites students to wrestle with the difficulties of empirically-based, inductive research and writing.

Campus Tour Ethnography Rationale: This assignment served two central purposes. First, it gave students the opportunity to try their hands at the whole process of doing ethnography, which is socio-cultural anthropology's genre of research and writing. Second, it invited students to begin the process of inducing arguments rather than deducing conclusions through several stages of writing and peer-reviewed revision. At the time in which we did this assignment, students had read excerpts from three different ethnographies and done short response papers on them. This assignment invited students to put into practice what they had just read and to do so about a topic that is deceptively familiar—the experience of going on a campus tour. In asking each student to go on an official Cornell Campus Information and Visitor Relations (CIVR) tour for prospective students and their families, I was offering them a small window into inter-generational interactions on-campus while inviting them to undertake the process of self-reflection through the ethnographic process.

Preparation: I began planning this assignment sequence early and so had obtained all the necessary IRB clearance and permission from the CIVR staff. In fact, the director of CIVR and one of her staff members facilitated the assignment by coming into class when I introduced the assignment and providing students necessary background information on the tours. I expected most students to have been on a tour before, but to have never done ethnographic research or writing before. Therefore, I made sure that we had read examples of ethnographies—three in all (*The Nuer* by Evans-Pritchard, *Everything Was Forever, Until It was No More* by Yurchak and *Under Construction* by Kendall)—and that they had written response papers in which they had to identify key features of ethnography as compared to travelogues and other cognate genres. This assignment would give students a chance to peer inside the black-box of the ethnographic process rather than just read its finished product. Therefore, I prepared two major in-class activities to facilitate the two major shifts in writing I asked students to do over the course of the sequence: 1) fieldnotes to field report, and 2) field report to ethnography (see below and enclosed). Both of these activities drew on my own fieldnotes and field report after I had gone on a campus tour before the semester started and suggested possible directions students could go in with the instructions I provided (see below and enclosed). In addition, students were asked to complete peer review forms for each member of their group, which they later submitted as part of portfolios (see below and enclosed). The peer review forms drew particular attention to what James Slevin calls the “intellectual work” of looking for “what counts as evidence” in his *Letter to Maggie*. This assignment was an introduction to ethnography by way of paying closer attention to the evidence one uses to make an argument.

Reflections: I was concerned that a 75-minute campus tour would not come close to simulating the practical and intellectual challenges of doing ethnography. Therefore, I was surprised to hear some of the most extroverted and confident speakers in class share how “lonely” they found the experience. One student likened the experience of being the only one without friends or family on the tour to Evans-Pritchard's confessions of loneliness in *The Nuer*. Many other students agreed and suggested how different the experience was as an ethnographer compared to their experiences just a year before as prospective students. When combined with returning home over fall break, more than one student found the campus tour an index of how much they had changed in a relatively short period of time. One student, for example, adopted Evans-Pritchard's writing style to find an appropriately distant way to approach an extremely personal experience. Another student began to suggest the campus tour as a key site of university culture construction, which is an argument I had not foreseen being so focused on the inter-generational component between prospective students and parents. Overall, the tour experience provided enough of an approximation of fieldwork for some students to make anthropological arguments. However, the majority of students struggled with the “jump,” as one

student called it, of going from a few observations on a tour to an argument about generations. One student's self-evaluation is emblematic of what several other students said:

The campus tour ethnography assignment was unlike any other that I've done. It was helpful that we had read other anthropological writing before undertaking our own ethnographies, but it was more difficult to get good results than I had expected... In my transition from notes to report to ethnography, I found it wasn't too difficult to make individual observations and analyses based on those observations, but it was a lot harder coming up with an argument... What was difficult about this assignment was that we needed to use inductive reasoning. Based on our observations of a few parents and students, we had to move to the large picture and make inferences on the general interactions between parents' and students' generations on college tours.

Another student who shared the first draft of his ethnography with the class confirmed these reflections as he walked us through how he approached writing. What became clear over the course of the two weeks we spent on this assignment sequence is that many students became uncomfortable and unsure of themselves when asked to make an inductive argument. My strategy in responding to these challenges was to identify similar challenges in the ethnographies we had already read and how those ethnographers responded while encouraging students to identify a theme by carefully re-reading their fieldnotes and then re-reading their field reports to identify an argument for their ethnographies. I wanted to highlight the recursive nature of not only doing ethnographic research, but also doing ethnographic writing. As a result, I think many students got more out of this peer review process than any other we did during the semester.

If I were to do this assignment sequence over I would do more preparatory inductive reasoning exercises in-class and assign smaller ethnographic assignments before asking them to go on a campus tour. For example, I would have students observe a busy café or a classroom and then perhaps interview a friend before going on a tour. At the same time, I would have better integrated *The Everyday Writer* readings I had them do for homework into class and supplemented those readings with some foundational methodological descriptions of ethnography, which would possibly make the "jump" seem less dramatic. Ultimately, I am not sure if the "jump" can disappear in a first encounter with ethnography, particularly since it is an ongoing epistemological and methodological discussion within the discipline. I am sure, however, that I could have given students more tools to recognize it along with some effective responses to bridge it earlier on. Lastly, had I been more systematic in flagging ethnography's stylistic devices and formal properties in dealing with the "jump," this may have allowed some students to anticipate and better respond to the challenges of inductive research and writing.

Enclosed Documents:

- 1) Campus Tour Ethnography Instructions (as provided to students)
- 2) Campus Tour Field Report/Fieldnotes Peer Review Form (as provided to students)
- 3) Field Notes to Field Report Exercise (as presented in class to students)
- 4) Field Report to Ethnography Exercise (as presented in class to students)

CAMPUS TOUR ETHNOGRAPHY INSTRUCTIONS

Overview: This goal of this assignment is to offer you the opportunity to glimpse your environment, yourself, and perhaps your view of generations in a different light. The process of doing ethnography is quite different from reading a book or watching a film. As mentioned in *The Nuer*, there are practical considerations—you don't want people to fear or loathe you as an ethnographer. As mentioned in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* and *Under Construction*, there are also theoretical considerations—whose work do you draw upon and cite and what kind of sources do you want to include? There are a series of steps anthropologists go through in order to weigh these considerations. For this assignment, you will get a taste of this ethnographic process.

Fieldwork (1): We all walk around the Cornell campus everyday and many of you probably took campus tours. All of us have probably seen the tours on-campus—the prospective students, parents, grandparents, and younger kids walking around in a daze, the tour guide walking backwards, and the tour itself are all part of our everyday environment. For this reason, we often do not pay attention to them, and so the tours are mundane to us. In order to re-approach this mundane experience with a fresher pair of eyes, you will go on a Campus Information and Visitor Relations (CIVR)-run tour within the next week or **before you leave for Fall Break**. Please be sure to sign up for a tour before leaving class today and remember your time. All tours begin in front of Day Hall and last approximately 75 minutes. **You should plan on setting aside 90 minutes just to be safe and allow yourself time to take fieldnotes (see below).** It is important that you read through all stages of this assignment **BEFORE** going on the tour, particularly the fieldnotes instructions. This will allow you to focus on fewer things while you are on the tour and make writing your field notes, field report, and ethnography much easier.

Ethnography Rules while on the Tour:

- 1) You are there to do a job—namely answer the questions in the fieldnotes section—and so is the tour guide and the participants. Everyone needs to be able to comfortably do their job.
- 2) Doing your ethnographic work does not require that you speak at all. You should only speak if directly spoken to and avoid any personal conversation. If someone asks about you, simply say that you are a student doing an assignment for class.
- 3) Any positive or negative feedback from the CIVR staff about you will affect your Participation Plus grade accordingly.

Fieldnotes (2): This is the first stage of writing ethnography. There are many ways to do this so you should take a few moments and consider what may work best for you. You may want to jot down some questions before going on the tour or you may decide to save up all of your observations and impressions until after the tour. Regardless, you should assume that writing during the tour will be impractical and recording is not permitted. **I recommend allocating at least 20 minutes immediately after the tour to write full notes or reminders to yourself so you can fill in details later.** However you decide to write fieldnotes, you should be able to answer the following questions **IN NO MORE THAN TWO HANDWRITTEN OR TYPED PAGES**. You will turn in these fieldnotes with your field report (see below). The sooner you finish these notes, the better.

- 1) Who was on the tour? (No names or other background details, only about how many people were there and was there something striking about the tour participants? You should pay attention to dress, non-verbal communication and other visible identifiers to infer about these things.)
- 2) What time of day did you do the tour? (You need not write out the tour route and list of stops, but rather think of the general setting; were there lots of people out on campus and were people on the tour paying attention more to the tour guide or to the surroundings, for example?)
- 3) What was the discussion like between the tour guide and those on the tour? (Again you need not try and remember every word, but only what were the main topics that came up both from the guide and those on the tour? Did parents or older guests ask most of the questions or did the prospective students do so? Was there any particular topic(s) that got more attention than others?)
- 4) What were the discussions like between those on the tour NOT including the tour guide? (There is no way for you to capture all of this, but a good strategy is to stay within earshot of a group that appears to be a family for awhile and then try and move to at least one other family to compare and contrast reactions. Some details to look for are verbal as well as non-verbal communication between the students and their families—who looks more interested and when do they look so? What other conversations are going on and are they about the tour or not?)
- 5) What did you find yourself paying attention to the most—what the tour guide was saying, what others on the tour were doing, what was going on on-campus at the time, or something else completely?

Field Report (3): The better your fieldnotes, the easier the field report is. **The more time you can put between the fieldnotes and the report, often times the better the writing. This is because you often remember things, or remember them differently by seeing different connections with the passing of time (recall *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*). You may not only recall things from the tour you did a couple days ago, for example, but also the tour you did a year or so ago with your own family. Allow yourself time to add these connections to your fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are not a strictly objective account of what happened on the tour, but your experience of it, which can easily include recollections of previous experiences as well as inferences you draw from what people said or did not say. It is likely that you will go back and add details to your fieldnotes as you write your report. This is the mark of a careful and thorough ethnographer, not a forgetful or lazy one. Before sitting down to write the report, read your notes at least once. BEFORE writing the report, try and answer the following questions in a few sentences on your computer:**

- 1) If you had to pick ONE theme from the tour what would it be? (Note: This theme can boil down to a split second of conversation you overheard or have multiple instances both from the tour you just did and previous tours you went on with your own family. The best reports demonstrate a thoughtful connection between your own experience and that of those you observed.)
- 2) What evidence, both from the tour you just did and/or your own experiences, do you have for this theme? (Note: Evidence for this assignment includes personal reflections, observations from the tour, and any readings or films from this seminar. You can use

one OR all of these types of evidence. If you decide to use course readings or films, please consult *The Everyday Writer* and cite them properly.)

- 3) How can you most interestingly lead your readers, both me and your group members, to your theme? (Note: This can mean telling a chronological story, skipping around, beginning with something we discussed in class and using the tour to illuminate it, beginning with something from the tour and using class materials to illuminate it, or beginning with something you experienced outside of class and using the tour experience and/or class materials to illuminate it, etc.)

Whatever theme and course of writing you decide to take, your report must be no longer than THREE double-spaced pages with 12 point font and 1-inch margins. Please follow previous assignment conventions and title your field report "Campus Tour Field Report." Like Book Report #3, you will peer review each other's fieldnotes and field reports. I will give you time in class on October 7 to collectively decide on a protocol and deadline. The latest you can email your field report to group members is by **8 PM on Tuesday, October 14**. You will have the whole class on Thursday, October 16 to peer review. The peer review form can be found under Assignments on Blackboard. As before, please keep copies of ALL the peer review forms you write and receive (there should be TWO forms for each group member: the one you write for them and the one they write for you).

Ethnography (4): Give yourself at least a day then re-read your field report alongside all the peer review forms you received. Then go back and re-read your fieldnotes again—do you still think you chose the best theme, all things considered? If not, repeat the field report step. If so, your next task is to craft this theme into an argument. In order to do this, consider the following:

- 1) What evidence (from the tour, your own experiences, peer comments, and course readings) do you have to support your theme? I recommend writing or talking out (bug your roommate) what evidence you have and how it connects.
- 2) What does the evidence tell you (and your roommate) about generations that you **did not** already know, see, or perhaps want to believe? This element of surprise is a key ingredient to good ethnography. For example, "the common understanding of generations is that there is either a lineage or cohort model (see *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*)...going on a campus tour taught me otherwise..."
- 3) If you were surprised and/or learned something about generations through this ethnographic process, relating this surprising lesson to a course reading or something outside of class will be easier. For example, think back to how you related *Take Care of My Cat* to course readings. **Please be sure to relate your lesson to at least ONE source—course readings, films, and non-internet sources outside of class are all permitted. If you wish to use a source outside of this class, then I recommend clearing it with me first.**

Your ethnography must be at least FOUR and no longer than SIX PAGES double-spaced, 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Please follow assignment conventions and title it, "Campus Tour Ethnography" with appropriate citations and bibliography. **Please submit a hard copy of your ethnography at the beginning of class on Tuesday, October 21. This copy is for me, which I will give you comments on by Thursday, October 23. You have the OPTION to rewrite the ethnography by Tuesday, October 28 (the Portfolio 1 self-evaluation deadline).**

CAMPUS TOUR FIELD REPORT/FIELDNOTES PEER REVIEW

Author's Name: _____

Reviewer's Name: _____

- 1) What was the theme of this report?

- 2) What evidence did the author use to support this theme?

- 3) Look over the author's fieldnotes and field report and identify AT LEAST ONE thing that the author did well in the transition from notes to report

- 4) Next, identify AT LEAST ONE thing that the author could have done better in the transition from notes to report.

- 5) What is ONE lesson that you could take from the author's fieldnotes and field report and apply it to your own writing?

- 6) How would you assess the author's success in illuminating something about generations through his/her report? (Excellent, Good, OK, Below Average, Poor) Provide at least ONE piece of evidence for your assessment.

FIELDNOTES TO FIELD REPORT EXERCISE

- I. Instructions: Read over the below sample of fieldnotes and jot down answers to the questions following them. Next, discuss your answers with the person next to you.

Observations

Interpretations

<p>--Sunday 1 pm tour in August (a week before students arrived so campus pretty quiet except for early-arriving students)</p> <p>--went by campus store, union, arts quad, Rockefeller, Kennedy, ILR, Barton, Uris Hall and back to day</p> <p>--about 30 people, (majority parents, but not by much)</p> <p>--first question was from someone who appeared to be parent about where freshman live and how many years Cornell guarantees on-campus housing</p> <p>--in Q&A in Rockefeller: student asked question about typical dorm room and if they could see one (guide said they could try and go on North Campus by themselves, but likely locked)</p> <p>--Parent question about campus safety at end of tour by blue light phone (near Uris Hall)</p> <p>--Parent question about ratio of classes taught by grad students versus faculty (guide did not answer and he seemed annoyed)</p> <p>--Student question about percentage of Cornell students involved in Greek life</p> <p>--Law student on tour without any family wondered if she could do separate law school tour</p> <p>--Parent question about on-campus workout facilities—wanted to clarify if they had to pay on top of tuition and fees or if it is free for students? He was shocked and angered when he found out the price—mentioned not true of other schools to family</p> <p>--One Chinese family had younger boy who played around with the father more than paid attention to tour; they would take turns bumping each other</p>	<p>--so, so distracted by tour guide's silly anecdotes and misinformation (I felt like I know way more about her than anyone else on the tour—she is transfer student into ILR, older sister went here, where she studies, eats, works out...)</p> <p>--I would not have wanted to go to Cornell if I had been on that tour (reminded me of bad tour at Wake Forest)</p> <p>--guide wanted to present picture of Cornell as great through generations from Cornell and AD White through guy the student union named after, through famous current alumni</p> <p>--most of the prospective students appeared tired and/or disengaged except for the law student who knew she was coming... wait, there was one prospective student who spoke in Chinese to family who asked a question about the range of classes offered at Cornell</p>
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Questions

- 1) Can you glean a theme from the above notes?
- 2) If so, what evidence do you have for that theme?
- 3) If you had to write a field report using the above fieldnotes how would you start?

II. When you finish, get into your peer review groups (same ones as last time). Before the end of today's class you must have decided as a group how and when you will share your fieldnotes and field reports. The deadline is 8 pm October 14. The peer review form is up on Blackboard under Assignments.

FIELD REPORT TO ETHNOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Instructions: Get in pairs or threes with the people next to you and write answers to the following questions. Be ready to share your responses with the class in 15 minutes.

My Fieldnotes

Observations	Interpretations
<p>--Sunday 1 pm tour in August (a week before students arrived so campus pretty quiet except for early-arriving students)</p> <p>--went by campus store, union, arts quad, Rockefeller, Kennedy, ILR, Barton, Uris Hall and back to day</p> <p>--about 30 people, (majority parents, but not by much)</p> <p>--first question was from someone who appeared to be parent about where freshman live and how many years Cornell guarantees on-campus housing</p> <p>--in Q&A in Rockefeller: student asked question about typical dorm room and if they could see one (guide said they could try and go on North Campus by themselves, but likely locked)</p> <p>--Parent question about campus safety at end of tour by blue light phone (near Uris Hall)</p> <p>--Parent question about ratio of classes taught by grad students versus faculty (guide did not answer and he seemed annoyed)</p> <p>--Student question about percentage of Cornell students involved in Greek life</p> <p>--Law student on tour without any family wondered if she could do separate law school tour</p> <p>--Parent question about on-campus workout facilities—wanted to clarify if they had to pay on top of tuition and fees or if it is free for students? He was shocked and angered when he found out the price—mentioned not true of other schools to family</p> <p>--One Chinese family had younger boy who played around with the father more than paid attention to tour; they would take turns bumping each other</p>	<p>--so, so distracted by tour guide's silly anecdotes and misinformation (I felt like I know way more about her than anyone else on the tour—she is transfer student into ILR, older sister went here, where she studies, eats, works out...)</p> <p>--I would not have wanted to go to Cornell if I had been on that tour (reminded me of bad tour at Wake Forest)</p> <p>--guide wanted to present picture of Cornell as great through generations from Cornell and AD White through guy the student union named after, through famous current alumni</p> <p>--most of the prospective students appeared tired and/or disengaged except for the law student who knew she was coming... wait, there was one prospective student who spoke in Chinese to family who asked a question about the range of classes offered at Cornell</p>

Possible Themes

Theme 1: Prevalent difference between student and parent interest

Evidence: At least 4 questions asked by parents compared to 2 from students, body language (parents walked upright and attentive while students tended to look off and away)

Theme 2: Student interest tended to be on short-term versus longer-term parent interests

Evidence: Student question on seeing dorm room, Greek life, and classes offered versus parent interest in who is teaching classes, campus safety, and on-campus workout facilities (though this could equally support short-term interest)

Theme 3: What I care about when looking at universities changed. Perhaps the guide's anecdotes about celebrity alumni and campus history appealed to me more when I was a prospective undergrad, but as a graduate student I am now more concerned about finances, facilities such as library quality, and rigor of teaching.

Evidence: Recollections after the tour about what I can remember about campus tours when I was 18 (who graduated from Emory, Duke, Brown) and why I was so distracted and angered by the Cornell tour guide. The Cornell guide failed to answer the parent's question about who teaches most classes, which is more of a concern to me now, than all the information she did provide on alumni and campus history.

- 1) How would you turn each of the above themes into an argument?

Possible Arguments

Argument 1: There is a distinct difference between what prospective students and their parents look at when they go on a campus tour. Parents are generally more engaged than their children even though they will not be the ones to actually attend the school.

Argument 2: Prospective students and parents have different concerns when they go on a campus tour. Students tend to have short-term concerns—where they will be living, who their friends might be, and how much work they can expect. Parents, on the other hand, tend to have longer-term concerns—who will be teaching the classes, how much it will cost, and whether the campus is safe.

Argument 3: As a graduate student, I am positioned between prospective students and parents. Generationally, this offers me an advantage in being able to partially empathize with and appreciate both student and parent concerns when they go on a campus tour.

- 1) How would you organize an ethnography based on each of the above arguments?

Possible Organizational Approaches

Ethnography 1: Parents are more engaged than their children when taking a campus tour even though they will not be the ones attending the university. This finding supports a lineage approach to generations (Yurchak 2005) which holds that choosing a university is not just about what the student wants, but rather about maintaining and strengthening lineage prestige.

- give statistics on number of parents versus non-parents on tour (could contact CIVR to get more general statistics)
- contrast the body language of parents and students
- discuss the importance of lineages in *The Nuer* coupled with Yurchak's discussion

Ethnography 2: Parents and their children do not differ in their intensity of interest when taking a campus tour; rather the nature of their interest differs. Prospective students tend to demonstrate short-term interests whereas their parents manifest longer-term interests. This finding suggests that students tend to approach university as entering a new cohort whereas their parents approach it as a continuation of their lineage.

- contrast the questions students (dorm room, Greek life) versus parents (teaching, safety) asked
- discuss what a cohort versus a lineage is (Yurchak); Evans-Pritchard on the age-set system
- how having a cohort of friends (not necessarily a blood line lineage) is important to people when graduating high school (*Take Care of My Cat*)

Ethnography 3: The same experience can have a radically different meaning depending on where one is in their life. Going on a campus tour fully ten years after being a prospective undergraduate taught me how the passage of time changes one's outlook. Memory is never static; rather it's more like the fragile snow in a snowglobe which can be shaken up and resettled with only the smallest of triggers.

- discuss my irritation with the guide on the Cornell tour
- contrast that experience with my memories of going on tours 10 years before
- return to Cornell tour to see both parent and student interests
- Yurchak's discussion of memory

- 1) Are these three approaches mutually exclusive? If not, how would you go about combining them?